

BR and the Glass Bead Game 2

“Unser Spiel aber ist weder Philosophie, noch ist es Religion, es ist eine eigene Disziplin, und im Charakter am meisten der Kunst verwandt, es ist eine Kunst sui generis“.

p.140 Das Glasperlenspiel, Hermann Hesse. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt. Undated. Original publication Zurich 1943.

“Our game is however not philosophy, nor is it religion, it is a discipline in its own right, in character most closely related to Art; it is an art sui generis.”

This description is not unfitting for BR.

The Glass Bead Game (Das Glasperlenspiel) is a so-called utopian novel set (perhaps) in the 25th century but actually produced under a sense of the pressures preceding the second world war when the author had moved to Switzerland from Swabia.

(1) “I suddenly realized that in the language, or at any rate in the spirit of the Glass Bead Game, everything actually was all-meaningful, that every symbol and combination of symbols led not hither and yon, not to single examples, experiments, and proofs, but into the center, the mystery and innermost heart of the world, into primal knowledge. (Hermann Hesse in The Glass Bead Game))
The procedure for BR is rather the reverse of this: to go from the centre, defined as boundary and region, to every known form (including every example and proof) and to describe it as a system of boundaries and regions.

Given this distinction, the following quotation reflects aspects of BR:

(2) “Thus one of the principles of the Creed, a passage from the Bible, a phrase from one of the Church Fathers, or from the Latin text of the Mass could be expressed and taken into the Game just as easily and aptly as an axiom of geometry or a melody of Mozart.” (Hermann Hesse in The Glass Bead Game)

Indeed I have taken the whole of the Apostle’s Creed and expressed it as BR as well as the verse John 3:16 from the NT. The expression of any such material is not necessarily unique in the form in which I give it. As regards the expression of a melody in classical western music, or theorem in geometry, these are already in many respects directly translatable into suitable BR terms. The boundaries in music are indicated at the discourse level by the temporal notation (notes of different durations, bar lines) and the regions by the interrelated sequences of notes which constitute melodies, themes, motifs, et sim. also with their own implicit (and maybe controversial i.e. non-unique) boundaries at a higher level of analytical structure. At the acoustic level, that is, at the level of the object of musical discourse (of the musical score), i.e. the “music” itself, boundaries are tones and ratios of tones, as well as lengths of notes, and ratios of beats to the bar (2/4 etc.). Changes in dynamics (beginnings of crescendi etc.) are boundaries between regions of music with unchanging dynamic. Without going into smaller particulars of the diagrammatic representation, these indications should suffice to show that the application to music of BR is broadly unproblematic, although it may present interesting problems of detail.

Geometry may be considered likewise as a discourse with spatial forms as its objects, or, if the geometrical theory is viewed as a logical system, with the forms as a possible interpretation. Where size is concerned the BR expression is of course analogue (q.v.). Angles confine regions to particular shapes, and, aside from analogue considerations of their size, can be expressed by assigning orientations (that is, directions) to boundaries lengthwise in order to sequence them (?) along with degrees of turn to establish the size of the angle.

*There is (so far at least) reason to believe that, in principle, any music and any geometry can be expressed in BR. The sort of selective delicacy which Hesse seems to have had in mind for his glass bead game is un-necessary, since his apparent aims can be realised “across the board” in BR. Neither need (nor should) the enterprise lead into **into the center, the mystery and innermost heart of the world, into primal knowledge,**” (quote 1 above) but can rather reveal that the centre of the world (like the physical centre of the universe) is everywhere, and – which is the more*

subtle point – that the supposedly primal knowledge is eventually to be found in the commonplace.

*In short, that the universe becomes conscious of itself in all human-beings, at every occasion and location, through boundaries and regions, and that this consciousness, when contextualised by human life, is the substance and object of all our evolving adaptations, biological and socio-cultural; epistemologically, it is precisely the source of what divides, in spirituality, into both esoteric and exoteric, and in science of what becomes, on one side, **empirical observations** and on the other, **general theory**.*

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